United Nations A/62/655

General Assembly

Distr.: General
21 January 2008

Original: English

Sixty-second session
Agenda items 17 and 18

The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Letter dated 18 January 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I write to draw your attention to recent terrorist activity and violations carried out against Israel, as well as relevant developments in the region, in connection with the Security Council briefing and open debate on the Middle East scheduled for 23 January 2008.

Situation along the Blue Line

Although noted efforts have been made to implement Security Council resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1773 (2007), the situation along the Blue Line remains precarious. Moreover, during this reporting period, a number of grave violations occurred, further emphasizing the need for and the urgency of full implementation of resolution 1701.

On 8 January, two Katyusha rockets were fired on northern Israel from southern Lebanon. The rocket attacks occurred on the same day as another terrorist attack, in which two Irish peacekeepers serving under the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were injured in a roadside bombing. While Israel welcomed the statement to the press by the Council condemning the violations, the attacks underscore the importance of implementing resolution 1701 for international peace and security.

In this regard, my delegation wishes to refer to four clusters of concern relating to the resolution.

1. **Arms embargo**: Weapons continue to be transferred through the Syrian-Lebanese border, in violation of the arms embargo. Indeed, the 20 October position paper submitted by the Lebanese Government to the Security Council implicates Syria in facilitating transfer of weapons. This is an issue of great concern for international security, as seen in

08-21299 (E) 210108

recent Council presidential statements and the report of the Secretary-General on resolution 1701.

2. **Rearming of Hizbullah**: Moreover, some of these weapons are destined for areas south of the Litani River, where a rearmed Hizbullah maintains a formidable presence.

3. **The two abducted Israeli soldiers**: Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, kidnapped on 12 July 2006 by Hizbullah, remain held by their captors, without any sign of life given or any visit by the Red Cross. Resolution 1701 is explicit in its call for the immediate and unconditional release of the Israeli soldiers, and my delegation calls on the Council to implement these provisions, without delay.

4. **Demarcation of the Blue Line**: The incident on 7 January in the Halta area, where Israel detained a Lebanese suspect who crossed the Blue Line, is a reminder of the importance of demarcating the Blue Line. Israel returned the suspect to Lebanon after a short investigation. We hope that marking the Blue Line, as well as placing warning signs, will be instrumental in preventing future incidents.

Situation in the Gaza Strip

Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, which continued again on Monday this past week, have been met with an escalation of Palestinian violence and terrorist activity, specifically by Hamas terrorists who control the Gaza Strip.

Hamas's brutality is seen not only in its attacks against Israel, but also in its cynical abuse of humanitarian convoys and corridors, such as the smuggling of bomb-making materials on humanitarian trucks and the firing of rockets at border crossings. While Israel works to facilitate humanitarian assistance, Palestinian terrorists do everything in their capacity to thwart these efforts and provoke Israeli reactions. A marked contrast can be seen in the difference between Israel's and Hamas's humanitarian efforts. Since June 2007, Israel has permitted more than 9,000 Palestinians to enter Israel to seek medical treatment, while Hamas has fired more than 1,500 rockets and mortars.

States have the responsibility to protect their citizens, and Israel will continue to act in self-defence, in accordance with its inherent right under article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Israel carries out its counter-terrorist operations with respect to the applicable rules of international law, in particular international humanitarian law.

During this reporting period specifically, spanning 23 December 2007 until the present, some 300 Qassam rockets and mortars were fired by Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip. The majority of these rockets fell on the southern city of Sderot, whose civilian population has been subjected to these senseless, violent, and indiscriminate attacks aimed at disrupting the fabric of daily life.

According to a recently released study by Natal, the Israel Center for Victims of Terror and War, since 2001, when rocket attacks from Gaza began, 28 per cent of adults and 30 per cent of children in Sderot have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Moreover, 75 to 94 per cent of all Sderot children aged 4 to 18 exhibit symptoms of PTSD, such as sleep and concentration problems.

On 7 January 2008, six Qassam rockets and eight mortars were fired at Sderot. One rocket hit a home, wounding a 17-year-old boy. Later in the day, Palestinian terrorists disguised as a couple holding hands opened fire on IDF soldiers at the Erez Crossing. The shooting either set off a bomb carried by the female terrorist, or she detonated herself.

On 10 January, Palestinian terrorists fired another five Qassam rockets at Israel, including one that hit a house in Sderot. Four people sustained injuries, including a 17-year-old girl, who suffered shrapnel wounds, and a boy, who was hurt while attempting to take cover.

On 15 January, in the span of 24 hours, more than 100 rockets and mortar shells were fired at the cities of Sderot and Ashkelon. On the same day, a 20-year-old foreign volunteer from Ecuador was shot and killed by a Hamas terrorist sniper from Gaza while working in the fields of Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha. This deliberate singling out of a civilian target with precision weapons signifies an escalation in Hamas's terrorist activity, in addition to its policy of indiscriminate rocket fire.

In the ensuing days, from 16 to 17 January, some 10 Israeli civilians were injured after 50 Qassam rockets and 30 mortar shells were fired from Gaza. In Sderot, the Red Alert siren was sounded more than 14 times. Additionally, a Grad Katyusha rocket was found near a residential area in Ashkelon.

Hamas terrorists still hold Corporal Gilad Shalit, now in his twentieth month of captivity. The Red Cross or any other humanitarian agency has been denied permission to visit him and verify his condition. The refusal to provide details regarding Gilad Shalit's condition is cause for great alarm.

Throughout the month, Palestinian terrorists continued to smuggle weapons, money and other illegal munitions into Gaza, including via the southern border. Tunnels, burrowed deep beneath the ground, have been used by terrorists to move weapons.

On 29 December 2007, Israeli security forces stopped a truck in the West Bank en route to Gaza carrying 6.5 tons of potassium nitrate hidden in bags marked as sugar. Potassium nitrate is used to make explosives and power the rockets used by terrorists in the Gaza Strip. On 15 January, Israeli security services thwarted another attempt to smuggle chemicals for the manufacturing of explosives into the Gaza Strip. Two tons of bomb-making material, enough to produce 500 rockets, were found disguised as humanitarian aid at the Kerem Shalom crossing.

Following the return of Palestinian pilgrims to the Gaza Strip, Israel discovered that Hamas terrorists had smuggled some $100 million during that time. Hundreds of Gazans returning from the hajj to Mecca were allowed direct entry via Egypt, contrary to an earlier agreement with Israel. Hamas used the money to purchase more munitions and arms, and fuel its campaign of terrorism against Israel. The money smuggling underscores the importance of ensuring security at the border crossings, as called for in Security Council resolution 1373, among others.

Situation in the West Bank

Palestinian violence against Israelis also continued in the West Bank.

On 28 December 2007, Palestinian terrorists opened fire on three hikers in a drive-by shooting, killing two of the men, Cpl. Ahikam Amihai and Sgt. David Rubin, both off duty IDF soldiers. The third hiker, a woman, who managed to hide during the attack, was later treated for shock.

On 17 January 2008, Palestinian terrorists fired on Israelis in Beit Hadassah in Hebron. Fifteen bullets were fired, of which two penetrated houses and another hit the playground of a nursery school.

It is clear that Palestinian terrorism is the main impediment to peace and security in our region. Israel has demonstrated its commitment to advancing the bilateral process and continuing negotiations. But the Palestinian Authority must end the violence and terrorism against Israel, as is required according to its obligations under the Road Map, before any final agreement can be reached. Similarly, all States in the region should refrain from supporting and aiding the terrorist organizations, as required by various relevant Security Council resolutions.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the Security Council for the briefing scheduled for 23 January 2008.

(*Signed*) Daniel **Carmon**
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.